PRELIMINARY REPORT ON HOPPER DREDGE OPERATIONS

IN THE HOUSTON SHIP CHANNEL PROJECT

DECEMBER 2007 – JANUARY 2008

On December 18, 2007 the contract hopper dredge *Glenn Edwards* began work on the segment of the Houston Ship Channel from Station 59+400 to Station 78+000. Contract specifications required dredging an estimated 1,288,400 cubic yards (CY) of shoal material. The required depth of dredging was 47 feet below Mean Low Tide (MLT, Corps of Engineers Datum) with 2.0 feet of allowable overdepth.

Dredging began on December 18, 2007 and was completed on January 28, 2008. Dredging operations were continuous during this time period. A total of 138 loads containing 1,151,801 CY of material was collected and deposited into Placement Area No. 2.

The dredge was equipped with rigid draghead turtle deflectors, and 100% inflow screening with 4-inch mesh. NMFS-approved turtle observers provided 24-hour/day monitoring of dragheads and screens for each load cycle. The observers were employed by Coastwise Consulting, Inc. under a subcontract to the dredging contractor, Manson Construction Co.

No risk assessment trawling or relocation trawling was conducted during dredging operations.

During the performance of this dredging, no turtle takes were experienced. The water temperature during this project ranged from about 8.0° to 16.7°C.

Observer reports can be accessed at the USACE Sea Turtle Data Warehouse. The link is: http://el.erdc.usace.army.mil/seaturtles/project.cfm?Id=583&Code=Project.

Coordination was conducted with the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN). There was one report of a stranded green turtle that had injuries that could be consistent with a hopper dredge encounter. This turtle was found on Galveston Beach about six miles from the offshore placement area, and about 25 miles from the dredging site. It is unlikely that this stranding resulted from this hopper dredging operation. If this turtle was entrained by the draghead suction, the size of the carcass would have precluded it from passing through the inflow screens where it would have been observed by the endangered species monitor. If the injuries were sustained by the draghead without entrainment, it is unlikely that this turtle would have been found at the reported beach location because of the distance from the dredging site.

Material dredged was reported as mud. There were no indications that dredged material or debris encountered caused any unacceptable fouling of the screens.